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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4748
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2582
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1239
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1315
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0636
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5539
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 6071
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7574
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11. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for February 18-22, 2008 that did not feature in our other reporting:

- Darul Uloom in Deoband says Terrorism is Anti-Islamic
- BJP Targets Women's Vote
- US Presence Overwhelms DEFEXPO
- India and Pakistan Expand Bus Connections
- Andhra Pradesh Newsletter Gives Dalit Women a Voice

Darul Uloom in Deoband says Terrorism Anti-Islamic

11. (SBU) The influential conservative Darul Uloom madrassa in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, viewed by some as the ideological home of the Taliban, will host a conference on madrassa education on February 25. Media reports suggest 1,000 to 6,000 madrassa leaders will attend including Barelvi, Ahle Hadith, and Jamaat-i-Islami Hind representatives. Predictably Deoband did not invite any Shia Muslims. While the conference will focus on madrassa education broadly, Darul Uloom, will for the first time issue a declaration stating, "All acts of terrorism are anti-Islamic." The declaration will also ask that, "Muslims stay away from terrorists and terrorist organizations." According to Maulana Mahmood Madani, General Secretary of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, Deoband's political wing, "We have condemned terrorism earlier. But this time we felt that as an institution, the Darul Uloom had to take an initiative to make it clear that Islam does not sanction terrorism and that Deobandis do not believe in this either."

12. (SBU) Comment: The invitation to other Sunni sects signals an important step, but the exclusion of Shias remains telling of the deep divide within Islam. Political Section contacts report uncertainty as to whether the Barelvi leaders will actually attend. The importance of the terrorism

declaration from such a prominent institution cannot be underestimated. The Taliban claim to have been influenced by Deobandi teachings, though the madrassa's leaders repeatedly disavowed the Taliban during Poloff's November 2007 visit. However, when asked by the press whether suicide bombings constituted "terror acts," Vice Rector Maulana Abdul Khaleque Madrasi responded that Islam prohibits, "all forms of violence used to kill innocent individuals." This leaves the door slightly open for interpretation. Extremists can twist their logic through the opening, claiming for example that aid workers in Kabul supporting a "crusader" invasion are not innocent. But for the vast majority of Indian Muslims, the declaration is clear. Post will report the full text of the declaration when released.

13. (SBU) Comment Continued: While the proposed declaration is a welcome and overdue symbol, more important will be the conference findings on how to incorporate formal education subjects such as math and science into the madrassa curriculum. The realization from leading madrassas that they must modernize represents a significant first step. GOI will release details of a madrassa modernization program later next month. We hope the program will offer concrete solutions rather than an election season Muslim vote bank sop. End Comment.

BJP Targets Women's Vote

14. (SBU) The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced it will back a 33 percent quota reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. The party made this announcement at a rally organized by the BJP Mahila Morcha

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(Women's Wing) in New Delhi, which was attended by senior BJP leaders including Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani and party President Rajnath Singh. The BJP leadership urged the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to fulfill its promise outlined in its Common Minimum Program to introduce legislation in Parliament during the forthcoming budget session next week. Speaking at the rally, Advani commented that Prime Minister Singh should not delay bringing the bill to the Parliament and pledged BJP's support. Earlier this month the BJP had announced 33 percent reservation for women within its own organizational structure.

15. (SBU) Comment: The Women's Reservation Bill has been in limbo since 1997 due to insufficient political support in Parliament. The BJP announcement will be welcomed by women's groups that have been advocating the bill for over a decade. It is noteworthy that the BJP did not push for the reservation bill while it was in power from 1999 to 2004. With this new-found enthusiasm for political empowerment of women, the BJP is no doubt hoping to make inroads into the women vote during the coming elections. End comment.

US Presence Overwhelms at DEFEXPO

16. (SBU) India hosted DEFEXPO 08, the largest land-and naval-focused defense exposition in South Asia, in New Delhi February 15-19. The US presence was the largest in the show, with 46 defense companies present in all, winning the most TV and print news coverage, from what we have seen. Both Boeing and Lockheed Martin, who had huge exhibits, had full cockpit video simulators for their F-18 and F-16 fighters to give India a small taste of what it stands to gain in the Multi-Role Combat Aircraft competition (MRCA). Russia, another MRCA competitor, had no simulator for its MIG-29 at all, and the Swedish had one very small Gripen flight simulator, comprised of simply a few computer screens fastened to the wall. The French took second prize for volume (43 companies) and the Israelis perhaps second prize for quality of display booths at DEFEXPO. The Israelis exhibited an impressive panoply of UAVs, small-arms, optical

and sighting systems, advanced air-to-air missile systems and a full-cockpit attack helicopter simulator.

¶7. (SBU) Compared to the US, French and Israelis, The Russian presence at DEFEXPO was modest, with the entire ROSOBORONEXPORT booth only taking up as much space as the two Lockheed Martin and Boeing booths. Russia was otherwise only represented by a handful of mini-booths featuring small arms.

Italy,s FinnMeccanica had a much glitzier and impressive booth than the Russians, rivaling the best of the US exhibitors, with multiple displays of advanced radar systems (including a self-called AESA), missile systems, torpedoes and 3-D helicopter models. Saab, though with a smaller booth, dazzled with the wide range and sophisticated static displays of underwater UAVs, and sighting systems for armored vehicles.

India and Pakistan Expand Bus Connections

¶8. (SBU) MEA Deputy Secretary G. Balasubramanian (Pakistan) confirmed to PolOff February 15 that New Delhi would host technical-level bilateral discussions on expanding passenger bus connections between Indian and Pakistani cities such as New Delhi and Lahore, and between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib (reftel). Indian media reported on February 22 that it was decided at the meeting to increase the frequency of the Delhi-Lahore connection from two trips per week to three. This builds on the announced expansion of air links reported earlier.

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Andhra Pradesh Newsletter Gives Dalit Women a Voice

¶9. (U) For the past seven years, a group of six semi-educated Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh (AP) diligently published an independent monthly newsletter, Navodayam. What began as quarterly newsletter of the Indira Kranti Pratha, a state-run program to empower rural women in AP has become a monthly publication with nearly 30,000 copies printed and sold. Navodayam now covers the entire Chittoor district with 12 working reporters. While the project is sponsored by the GOI, the reporters claim they have been able to retain their independence. However they have not gained support from fellow media and other critics: the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists has denied the group,s membership because Navodayam is government-sponsored. Further, the magazine editor and core group of six women also have received death threats from men and opposition from the liquor lobby for exposing issues and problems of local women, including taboo and controversial issues such as alcoholism, HIV/AIDS, child marriages, child labor and domestic violence throughout the district. Despite the lack of electronic media outreach to rural populations, Navodayam has trained two workers in video documentation and has shown videos to villagers.

¶10. (U) The magazine has four aims: to amplify the voice of the rural poor; to put rural women in charge of news coverage; to place information within the reach of the rural poor; and to adapt journalism as a tool for empowerment of women.

¶11. (U) Comment: India,s vibrant media continues to lead the charge on raising awareness of social responsibility. With government support, a small town rag has become an instrument of change. A decade ago, Dalit women pursuing education, receiving training in language and writing and advocating their issues was unthinkable. And while the changing tides are threatening the establishment, it is heartening that the little newspaper that shouldn,t or couldn,t, is beginning to thrive. With accusations that the state's Congress Party government is engaged in unprecedented levels of corruption, the next test is whether or not the

writers will feel free enough to spill on its government
benefactors. End of comment.
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